

THE STAFF STUDY

(As a think-piece for getting decisions on problems.)

if you have trouble getting decisions from your supervisors

Did you ever stop to think that it might be due to the way you present the problem for solution? If an assistant is to be of maximum value to his boss, he has to learn to help the boss make sound decisions with a minimum expenditure of time. Fortunately, the assistant doesn't have to spend years experimenting to find an ideal method for presenting problems for sound decisions because one method has already been proven successful by experience in the staff study.

Over the years the staff study has ^{been increasingly used} ~~grown in acceptability as a~~ formal presentation piece for problem-solving at the policy level. One principal reason for this is the very nature of the staff-study format, which requires carefully organized thinking in a logical pattern. A good staff paper shows that this approach has been used in the development of the study; a poor staff paper shows too often the results of trying to fit a poorly organized study into the staff-paper format.

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~~Heretofore, little attention or emphasis has been placed on the concept of the staff study as an aid to clear, logical thinking and organization in the development of a sound solution to any problem, regardless of whether or not the problem requires presentation of a formal staff paper. The staff-study technique is an ideal "think-piece" mechanism for solving problems and presenting solutions orally or in a memorandum as well as in a formal staff paper.~~

This document is part of an integrated file. If separated from the file it must be subjected to individual systematic review.

Here is the method for applying straight, logical thinking to a problem and coming out with a sound decision by using the techniques required by the staff-study format.

1. ~~STATING~~ THE PROBLEM

Be sure you have a clear statement of the problem. This is ~~vital~~!

(It has been said that a problem well defined is half solved.)

When you get a problem from a higher echelon, don't be afraid to go back for more information to clarify it, if necessary.

~~Always remember that the problem is one for solution by a superior not a work assignment for you.~~ Don't state the

problem as, "study the organization of the 'X' branch and other similar branches and make recommendations for improvements."

The problem may be stated as a mission, such as, "determine the best type of organization to carry out the 'X' branch's functions." However, frequently the best and simplest way is to put the problem in the form of a question such as,

"what is the best type of organization for the 'X' branch?"

You may find after you have developed and analyzed the facts that the problem isn't quite what you originally thought it was and should be restated.

Keep the statement of the problem concise and specific.

2. Making ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions must be based on fact but need not be proven.

Use assumptions only if you need them for a logical discussion of the problem.

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3. Gathering and presenting FACTS

Gather all the facts that bear on the problem but present only the important ones. (Pertinent details can be put in annexes.) Resist the temptation to put in interesting information that shows the boss how much work you've done on the problem but doesn't directly bear on the solution to the problem. If important enough, put ^{this information} ~~it~~ in a separate memorandum.

4. DISCUSSION of the facts

The discussion section of the study is the place to analyze the facts in a way that will lead to reasonable conclusions. The advantages and disadvantages of alternative courses of action should be weighed in thinking through the problem, but it is not necessary to list them all in the paper. Screening is as important in discussion as in facts. Inclusion ^{de} ~~only~~ pertinent discussion, ^{to} ~~will~~ accent the facts that have a definite bearing on the problem and help sell the logical solution.

5. Drawing CONCLUSIONS

If the paper is short, the conclusions may be obvious, ~~in which case they~~ ^{and} need not be stated. ^{Conclusions} ~~where used, they~~ should show the result ^{from a reasoned judgment of the effects and implications of the essential facts pointed up by discussion, and should logically lead to} ^{recommendations for} ~~certain action~~ ^{by} ~~that~~ the supervisor, ~~should take.~~

6. RECOMMENDATIONS for action

Recommendations should provide a clear-cut solution to the problem and permit a simple approval or disapproval. State exactly who is to take the action that is to be approved.

7. COORDINATION of the study

When the boss receives a staff study, he wants to be sure that it represents the views of every component having an official interest in the problem or directly involved in carrying out the recommendations. This doesn't mean that the paper should be diluted to the point of the least common denominator of agreement. Dissent can sometimes prove valuable and may lead to improvements in the paper without changing the basic proposal for action.

Be sufficiently flexible so that you can yield on unimportant details without compromising on principle.

Whenever possible deal directly with those who have authority to concur. However, be sure that in developing the study you have paved the way with others who have an official interest in the study.

Remember that the staff study was developed to produce clear logical thinking and a standard format for formal presentations. As an aid to sound decision-making, the use of its format and the techniques required in its development have a much broader application. Regardless of the level at which you operate, regardless of whether you are staff or line, you can use the techniques required by the development of a staff study to your advantage in solving problems and getting prompt sound decisions.